

FIVE PRACTICES FOR TEACHING LIKE YOURSELF

Writing a book about teaching like yourself is a challenge because I can't simply tell you what I did and suggest you do the same. That would really be missing the whole point of being your true self. So I can't offer you steps or tips. What I can offer are the practices I have witnessed in myself and countless other teachers as we've come to really own their teaching in truly powerful ways. What follows is a brief description about each practice. Know that each practice also has its own chapter, with examples and ideas to help you step more fully into teaching like yourself, and is part of the larger Teach Like Yourself Manifesto (see Chapter 7). Think of this like a sneak peek.

Name Your Core Beliefs

Part of being yourself is naming and knowing your own core beliefs about teaching and learning. By naming these beliefs, we create our framework and foundation to which we can come back over and over again. This feels like the heart of our teaching. Every other choice we make stems from the beliefs just like all our organs are fed from the blood that pumps through our hearts. By writing down our beliefs, we can revisit them, remind ourselves of them, and revise them as we gain more and more experience with students.

View Your Teaching as a Practice

Another part of teaching like yourself is connecting your teaching to your beliefs. This means examining teaching choices to see whether they match what we want for our students and what we value. By viewing our teaching as a practice, we can adjust, change course, and rethink our teaching choices on an ongoing basis. We can see that each class, each student interaction, and each lesson offers an opportunity to craft our practice. Doctors have a medical practice and lawyers have a law practice; really, everyone hones their craft, from carpenters to hair stylists, and we teachers can do the same. The term *practice* also reminds us that we have never learned it all or arrived at perfection but always have more to learn and develop.

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Build Balanced Relationships

Teaching like yourself doesn't mean shutting your classroom door and becoming an island. It actually means cultivating the kinds of professional relationships that nurture and sustain you. When we begin to take the risks to be ourselves as teachers, it gives our colleagues permission to do the same. After all, none of us can have any true and

lasting relationships with each other when we are all pretending to be something we are not. The same goes for our student relationships. According to the Quaglia Student Voice Survey (2016), students who have a sense of purpose, believe they can be successful, and are supported by their teachers are seventeen times more academically motivated. Students learn more and better from teachers they like and connect with. Teacher credibility, an outcome of student and teacher relationships, is one of John Hattie's (2016) top qualities for effective instruction with a 0.9 effect size. By building strong, real relationships with everyone in our schools, we are more at ease, more effective, and frankly have much more fun.

Drive Professional Growth

Teaching like yourself does not mean being stagnant and stopping your learning. It actually means the opposite. When we know ourselves well—our strengths, our blind spots, and our insecure parts—we can begin to seek professional opportunities that will help us grow. This used to mean signing up for workshops. While I am still a huge fan of workshops, we don't always get permission from administrators to leave the building or there may not be a budget. We can also seek professional growth opportunities for free or next to nothing. Getting on Twitter and joining professional chats, viewing webinars, and reading blog posts and articles are all great ways to develop in an area you want to learn more about. Reading professional books with colleagues in book clubs is a way to both build relationships and develop and grow. In fact, there are so many learning opportunities for teachers today, the challenge is choosing what you want to focus on.

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Take Care of Yourself

This final practice is much more than just being yourself as a teacher; it is about making sure you are taking care of your whole self so you can show up healthy, happy, and ready to teach. So many teachers I know (including myself at times) run themselves down, skip lunch, don't get to go to the bathroom, and respond to e-mails late into the evening. We stay up too late. We have trouble saying no. We put ourselves last. As teachers, we are not just modeling how to read, or solve math problems, or synthesize historical events; we are also modeling how to take care of ourselves. Plus, when we get sick or exhausted all those other intentional practices go out the window. We take shortcuts because we can't possibly handle being our best selves. Getting fresh air, drinking enough water, saying no to things you can't possibly handle, and creating healthy boundaries are all a part of teaching like yourself too.

Five Practices for Teaching Like Yourself

- ★ Name your core beliefs.
- ★ View your teaching as a practice.
- ★ Build balanced relationships.
- ★ Drive professional growth.
- ★ Take care of yourself.



Look at the description of the five practices for teaching like yourself. Which one stands out to you the most? Why? Which do you think you already do well? Which are you excited to learn more about?

As this chapter ends, I'll remind us of that helpful advice from my aunt: Trust yourself. You will know what is right. Listen to your instincts. In Chapter 2, we'll dive into the practices that will help us do exactly that—let's begin by naming our core beliefs.

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